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VIETNAM:

THE PAST.....by JOAN KENNEDY TAYLOR

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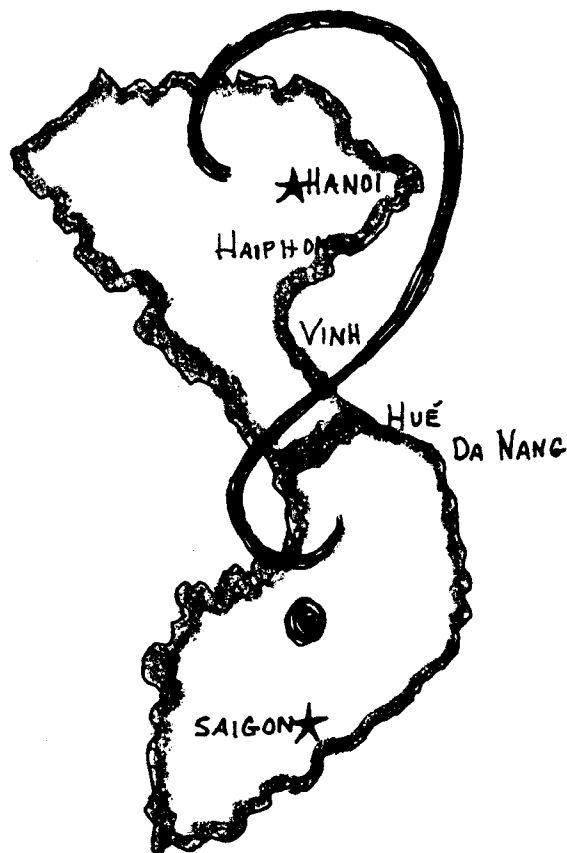
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Vietnam: The Past

One of the results of having a pragmatic approach to foreign policy is that, since the past is considered irrelevant in determining how to handle existent crises, people do not remember clearly what happened in the past. This is true, not merely of the events of centuries ago that might shed light on the events of the present; it is often true of the events of last year, or last month, or even last week. This lack of information became particularly apparent to me in trying to sort out the mass of material on Vietnam to answer the questions that are being constantly asked today: How did we get involved in Vietnam? *Should* we be in Vietnam? If the people want our help, why haven't we won?

This article won't try to answer these questions. It will merely attempt to present the reader with some of the background material which may be omitted or even distorted by the newspaper, or newscast, or magazine article that provides him daily with the newest facts and opinions on the war in Vietnam.

The country now known as Vietnam falls naturally into three geographical sections, which have often been politically separated. In the north, bounded by China, is Tonkin (sometimes called Tongking), containing a ring of mountains, and the delta plain of the Red River. Central is Annam, a chain of mountains and a narrow coastal plain, leading to plateaus in the south. The most southern region of all, Cochinchina, contains the fertile delta of the Mekong River. In prehistoric times, the Vietnamese people inhabited Tonkin, the Chams were based in Central and Southern Annam, and the Khmers (who also inhabited Cambodia) lived in the Mekong delta.

The Vietnamese were under Chinese domination from 111 B.C. until 939 A.D. Tonkin and northern Annam,

under the collective name of Nam-viet, were part of the Chinese empire for that entire period. Vietnamese culture and political institutions became heavily influenced by those of China, but their pre-Chinese cultural roots were never completely lost, and early Vietnamese history is full of heroes who led uprisings against the Chinese.

Gradually, the Vietnamese people expanded south. After the T'ang dynasty fell in China, in 907, nationalist agitation among the Vietnamese led to the establishment of the independent kingdom of Dai-co-viet in 939. Dai-co-viet soon came into conflict with the neighboring kingdom of Champa, in the area later known as Annam. The Vietnamese defeated the Chams after a long struggle over several centuries. They then expanded even further.

"At the beginning of the Christian era they occupied Tongking and northern Annam only. They pushed southwards at the expense of the Chams, whose kingdom they conquered in the fifteenth century. Under the leadership of the Nguyen of Hue the last remaining independent Cham districts were absorbed during the seventeenth century. In the same century the Vietnamese began to plant colonies in the Mekong delta region in what was then Cambodian territory, and from that time onwards their steady penetration into Cochin China has been continuous."

(Hall, p. 169) Today, with the exception of between one and two million aboriginal hill tribesmen, several hundred thousand Chams and Khmers, and at least as many Chinese, the Vietnamese inhabit all of Vietnam. It has an estimated total population of 30 million.

The cities of Hanoi and Hue developed early as important centers of power, often as capitals for rival authorities. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the country was often divided into fac-

tions, which fact encouraged Europeans to take advantage of the situation. The Portuguese in Macao established trade with both Annam and Tonkin. It was they who gave the Southernmost provinces the name of Cochin China. Spanish and French missionaries arrived and romanized the Vietnamese written language with a system which is still in use.

From the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, the country was peaceably divided north of Hue, with one dynasty established at Hanoi, and another in the south. The Trinh dynasty in Hanoi instituted tax reforms, surveyed the land, improved the court system and lessened the severity of punishments, and removed some of the feudal power that had been in the hands of the mandarins. It also regulated the salt trade and the mines, printed books in the Vietnamese language, and banned Chinese books. The Nguyen in the south instituted census and tax assessment methods and established a bureau of agriculture "which classified cultivated lands and encouraged the cultivation of virgin soil." (Hall, p. 360) They put the army on a territorial basis, with the basic platoons made up of men from the same village, and expanded their political control into the Mekong delta. Both regions were run by mandarins recruited by examinations in the classics, which was the Chinese model. "In 1675, Hien Vuong [a Nguyen leader] strove to improve upon this by introducing a sort of practical examination on the current situation." (Hall, p. 360)

This was the level of civilization in the country when conflict broke out again, and a member of the southern Nguyen dynasty, helped by a French missionary and some volunteer French troops, unified the three regions of the country and established himself as the Emperor Gia Long. Gia Long called his country Vietnam, and established his capital at Hue, in Annam. He proclaimed himself Emperor on

June 1, 1802.

Gia Long reestablished the old administration where war had brought chaos, and his ties with the French meant that Christianity thrived. But after his death in 1820, his successors turned on the Europeans and instituted ever-increasing persecution of Christians. In 1858, a Franco-Spanish occupation force arrived at Tourane, and although the Spanish withdrew with a promise of religious freedom, the French went on to capture Saigon in February, 1859. Demanding both religious freedom for Catholics and trade opportunities for Frenchmen, the French obtained a draft treaty which ceded the three eastern provinces of Cochin China to France, granted religious freedom, opened three ports to trade, and paid an indemnity. By November they were masters of all lower Cochin China. By 1863, unrest made the French governor decide to also occupy the three western provinces of Cochin China.

Trade interests brought the French into various conflicts with the local government in Hanoi. A French resident was established at Hué by a second treaty signed in 1874, which also opened additional ports to French trade (with consuls in each), declared the Red River open to commerce, and provided for French officers to be appointed to the Vietnamese customs service.

However, hostilities began again in 1882, and another treaty was signed, making Vietnam a French protectorate. After a brief undeclared war with China, French supremacy was established at the Treaty of Tientsin in 1885.

In October, 1887, the Union Indochinoise was formed by a series of decrees. "These placed the Protectorates of Annam and Tongking in the hands of the Minister of Marine and Colonies in Paris, and brought

together Cambodia, Cochin China, Annam and Tongking to form the Union Indochinoise, the higher administration of this was entrusted to a civilian governor-general and was divided into five departments. . . . Under the direct authority of the governor-general Cochin China had a lieutenant-governor, Annam and Tongking combined a resident-general, and Cambodia a resident-general. Each of these units maintained an autonomous organization and had its separate budget." (Hall, pp. 576-7) Cambodia had signed a treaty in 1863 which made it a French protectorate. In a treaty accepted by Siam on October 3, 1893, France claimed that the territory of Laos should be granted to her, because it had once been a protectorate of Vietnam in the seventeenth century. Laos was then added to the Indochinese Union.

Under the French occupation, Tonkin, although theoretically a protectorate, was actually a directly administered colony. The French policy was not one of colonial self-government, but of assimilation. The governor-general was assisted by a purely advisory body, the Grand Council of Economic and Financial Interests, and most legislation was either passed by the French parliament or merely decreed by the Minister of Colonies. Control of Annam, Cambodia, and Laos was looser--kings, courts, and mandarins continued to exist and function, although the power was with the French resident, his Privy Council, and his Protectorate Council. But the administration in these areas was carried out by the mandarins, although French guidance was never far removed. Cochin China had a resident also; it was under direct French rule, with a French representative in the Chamber of Deputies in Paris.

What did the French bring to Vietnam? They brought an increase in population through their work in tropical diseases as well as the hospitals they built and the sanitation problems they dealt with.

They established scholarly centers in Hanoi and built Saigon into a thriving commercial center. However, they brought a decline in the literacy rate: Robert Shaplen says that at the end of World War II eighty percent of the Vietnamese were illiterate, and Marguerite Higgins says that by the end of the Indochinese War it was ninety percent. Both agree that this illiteracy rate was substantially higher than in the early nineteenth century, before French colonialism was established. The French achieved this decline through an attempt to introduce French culture by discouraging village schools, abolishing the old mandarin competitive examinations, and finally, in 1917, attempting to take over all primary education and make the study of French universal--so few schools were actually built that by 1926 a ruling was passed that villages which had no schools were *allowed* to provide their own.

The French also brought the economic philosophy of mercantilism which, as applied to colonies, is also often referred to as economic imperialism. The purpose of a colony, so far as the French were concerned, was to supply raw materials that the French needed and to buy products that the French wanted markets for. Under no circumstances was the colony to produce products that competed with those of the mother country. It was vital to the French that their protectorate establish France as a "most favored nation" economically, and that they have complete control over Indochina's customs and foreign trade. Within the country there were economic regulations. Thus whatever enterprise there was, was far from free, but was a creature of government manipulation and government favor.

The Vietnamese village had traditionally been taxed not only in money but also in workers for public projects. But this had been for projects near the workers' village and from which the village was

seen to benefit. Under the French, labor in public works was still required, but the resultant works, such as highways and railroads, were from the villager's point of view, for the benefit of the French and for the encouragement of foreign tourists. The French administration had a monopoly on salt, opium, and alcohol. "The small salt worker had to sell what he produced to the French administration and then buy back what he needed for himself at higher prices; and salt was important to him, for he used it in preparing the fish which was a vital part of the Vietnamese diet. The French administration had a substantial interest in spreading the use of opium and alcohol because it profited directly from their sale. It assigned each village a quota of alcohol which it was required to consume. . . . In France, the smoking of opium was a criminal offense; in Indochina it was one of the financial props of the government." (Hammer, pp. 68-69)

Apart from these three governmental monopolies, French businessmen also were given grants of undeveloped land, and they controlled textile industries, mines, rubber plantations, and banking. In my research I have not been able to discover whether French monopolies in these areas were established by law or by custom--what seems clear is that they were unbroken.

The banking monopoly was especially important, because it resulted in a change in the pattern of land distribution. Every village in Vietnam had traditionally had some communal lands as well as private fields, and the communal lands were cultivated by people without rice fields of their own. The French encroached upon these communal lands, and also formed large estates from small private holdings "through the purchase of forfeited land or land on which loans at exorbitant interest rates had been made."

(Hall, p. 655) In Cochin China under French rule, 200,000 families which had once been independent landholders were sharecropping for French landlords, and suffered greatly from a slump in 1930 in which many large estates went under. Crucial in the financial situation was the French-owned Bank of Indochina, which would lend money to the big landowners who in turn lent it at exorbitant rates to the small farmer.

Robert Shaplen described the situation as it still existed in 1950. "The French still own practically all of the real wealth of Indochina, and their investment was close to two billion dollars; they owned all the rubber plantations, which, despite the war, were still operating--as they are operating today, in 1965--and they owned two-thirds of the rice, all the mines, all the shipping, virtually all the industry, and nearly all the banks. . . . French fortunes were being made through the remittance machinery legally established for the transfer of piastres into French francs, falsely pegged at seventeen to the piastre; the franc had remained relatively stable, but the piastre had depreciated more than five times since the end of the Second World War." (Shaplen, pp. 80-81)

And there were still other inequities. Many plantation workers for the French rubber plantations in Cochin China were recruited by a system which Ho Chi Minh, the Communist leader, was able plausibly to refer to as conscription. They came reluctantly from Tonkinese villages and were "sent south far from their homes to work under a semimilitary system. They were bound by three-year contracts which gave their employers the right to regulate their labor by force. They lived and worked under the most miserable conditions." (Hammer, p. 67)

Indochinese also had to import goods from France

which they might have bought for less elsewhere, and were barred from important jobs in the colony, such as the police or the customs. "There was little freedom of press or assembly. The Vietnamese were not permitted to form political parties or trade unions, and could not travel among the three Vietnamese regions without permission; to go to France, they needed a police visa." (Hammer, p. 73) Add to this the fact that the French were often repressive rulers, severe about suspected insurrection, and that during World War I they did not add to their popularity "by forcibly recruiting no less than 100,000 of them [the Vietnamese] for war service in Europe." (Hall, p. 646)

It is small wonder that under these circumstances a certain amount of clandestine political activity and even some abortive rebellions took place, and that the Communist Party was particularly interested in exploiting the situation.

The leader of Vietnamese communism since its inception has been Nguyen Ai Quoc, now known as Ho Chi Minh. He joined the Communist Party in France before World War I, and presented an appeal for Vietnamese independence to the Versailles Treaty conference. He wrote for leftist political journals in France and studied in Russia in 1923. In 1925 he appeared in China, at Canton, and founded the Association of Revolutionary Annamite Youth, a supposedly non-Communist, but Marxist, organization. His program included "the reduction of fiscal burdens, the redistribution of land among the peasantry, and the abolition of conscription of labourers and native soldiers for service abroad." (Hall, p. 648)

In 1929, the Association had a congress in Hong Kong, at which it was suggested that the name be changed to the Indochinese Communist Party. The resolution was not passed, and the three members who had made

the suggestion returned to Indochina and established their own organization with that name. Soon there were three separate Communist Parties within Indochina, and an appeal was issued to Ho Chi Minh to save the situation. He united all factions into the Vietnam Communist Party, which in October, 1930, changed its name to the Indochinese Communist Party. By 1931, it was said to have 1,500 members and to control 100,000 peasants through affiliated organizations. However, an uprising which started in 1930 and was put down in 1931 killed thousands of illegal strikers and caused the arrest of hundreds of Communists.

The Indochinese Communist Party recovered and reformed itself slowly, and it was not until 1935 that it sent delegates to an international meeting at Macao, where it stated its allegiance to the Comintern. This was the period of the Popular Front.

Under instructions, the Indochinese Communists joined with other parties in a legal movement to present Vietnamese grievances to the French government. France itself was controlled by a Popular Front government, which, once in power, was no more quick than any previous French government to turn the colonies loose. In 1938, the French Popular Front government fell. The Indochinese equivalent went underground, which did not keep some of its Communist leaders from being jailed. Then World War II broke out.

In 1941, Ho Chi Minh met with key members of the Indochinese Communist Party in south China, and established an organization which they hoped would rally all Vietnamese. It was called the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi (Viet Minh), which means the League for the Independence of Vietnam, and Ho Chi Minh was General Secretary. It was to be the only really organized resistance movement in Indochina.

against the Japanese.

So now we have on stage a cohesive people with a proud history and an ancient culture based on village-oriented ideals of education and order; a mercantile colonial power whose partisans will claim later that its actions were dictated solely by love of freedom; and a Russian-trained Communist whose partisans will claim that he is merely a dedicated nationalist. There are two more men to introduce: Emperor Bao Dai and Ngo Dinh Diem.

In 1925 Bao Dai, a young descendant of Emperor Gia Long succeeded to the throne of Annam. He was educated in France, and in 1933 returned to Indochina to ascend the throne. The post of Prime Minister at the court of Hué had been abolished by the French, and his function assumed by the French resident, which meant that the highest post in Bao Dai's cabinet was that of Minister of the Interior. This post was given to a young, anti-Communist nationalist, who had already served as a province chief in 1923. His name was Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem attempted to get the French to introduce a representative assembly, and resigned when they refused. This unwillingness to compromise was to be characteristic of his career, as we shall see later.

It was not characteristic of the career of Emperor Bao Dai, who remained on the throne of Hué when the Japanese occupied the country in force in 1941 during World War II. The Japanese were willing to leave a framework of French control, and to give verbal assurances of French sovereignty, even to allow the French to maintain their own army, as long as their fight against the Allies could be based and supplied in Indochina.

On March 9, 1945, the Japanese ousted the French

in a *coup d'etat* and informed Bao Dai that his country was free. The man who, according to Ellen Hammer, had not been permitted to go to Tonkin more than once in twelve years, and whom the French had never permitted to visit Cochin China, announced to his people that Vietnam was independent (although under Japanese protection) on March 11, 1945. Ellen Hammer says that he sent a telegram to Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon, asking him to be Prime Minister, but that the Japanese feared Diem's independence and kept the message from being delivered to him in Saigon.

The first action of the new government was to rename the country Vietnam, instead of Annam, as it had been known to the French. The functions of government in Tonkin were gradually turned over to the new regime by the Japanese, but Cochin China remained under Japanese military control.

Power was still in the hands of the Japanese, and the members of Bao Dai's cabinet had almost no experience of politics. According to Marguerite Higgins, "In the process of the ensuing economic disintegration and famine, more than a million Vietnamese died of hunger. Bao Dai's ministers failed not only him but also the cause of Free Vietnam. For their failures played into the hands of both Ho Chi Minh's Communist forces and the French colonialists." (Higgins, p. 38)

Between March and August, the Viet Minh became more active in harrying the Japanese, and attacked Bao Dai's government as a puppet regime. They "liberated" several provinces from the Japanese.

On August 6 an atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima.

The Viet Minh called its troops the Vietnam Liberation Army, and called for a general revolution;

a congress unanimously elected Ho Chi Minh president on August 16. Large numbers of Vietnamese joined the Viet Minh armies. Soldiers moved on Hanoi.

On August 26, Bao Dai abdicated, calling on "all parties and groups, all classes of society as well as the Royal Family to strengthen and support unreservedly the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam in order to consolidate our national independence." (quoted in Hammer, p. 104)

On September 2, which was proclaimed Independence Day, Ho Chi Minh made his first public address. The speech was aimed at the victorious Allies, as well as at the cheering crowds. "It took its first paragraph from the stirring words of the American Declaration of Independence: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident. That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.' It indicted the French for 'deeds counter to the ideals of humanity and justice.'" (Hammer, p. 105)

Meanwhile, in Cochin China, things were not so smooth for the Viet Minh. Other groups of nationalists, including two armed religious sects, the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, did not trust the Viet Minh and refused to give up their weapons. On August 25 the Viet Minh had set up a Committee of the South which took over power in Saigon. On September 2, during the Independence celebrations, five Frenchmen were shot and French houses were looted, despite the attempts of the Communist Committee of the South to maintain order.

At the Potsdam Conference, the Allies had agreed on a plan for the liberation of Indochina. It was to be partitioned at the 16th parallel, and the

Nationalist Chinese were to occupy the north section of the country while the British occupied the south.

British and Indian troops arrived in Saigon on September 12, bringing with them some French troops from Africa. Although British orders were only to disarm the Japanese and accept their surrender, these were interpreted to include restoring the repressive French colonial regime. The British commander proclaimed martial law; imposed a curfew; and made newspapers, public meetings, and the carrying of arms by any but Allied soldiers illegal. On September 23, French soldiers released from their Japanese internment took over Saigon.

In Tonkin, on the other hand, the Chinese occupying troops allowed the Vietnamese to keep their weapons and, rather than return the French to power, they supported Ho Chi Minh's administration.

There is no need to discuss in detail the Indochina War that followed. The French were in a position to reassert their authority in the south; the Viet Minh had authority in the north. The country was divided, and the bulk of the Vietnamese people were caught in between. Even firmly anti-Communist nationalists, notably Ngo Dinh Diem, would not criticize the Viet Minh openly, as they were the forces fighting for Vietnamese independence. But Diem also refused to work with them.

The French made several abortive agreements with Ho Chi Minh, while searching for a Vietnamese leader they could set up in opposition to him, who would settle for less than full independence. In 1949 they persuaded Bao Dai to return and set up a government in Saigon under their auspices; Ngo Dinh Diem refused to be associated with anything short of full independence. On January 19, 1950, Ho Chi Minh, who still held most of Tonkin, was recognized

diplomatically as the legitimate ruler of Vietnam by the newly victorious Chinese Communist regime, followed shortly by Russia and the satellite nations of Europe. On February 6, 1950, the United States and Great Britain recognized the Bao Dai regime.

By 1954, the French people were sick of the war in Indochina. When the Viet Minh won a major battle at Dienbienphu in Laos, the French were ready to withdraw. The Americans, considering that the Vietnam crisis was closely involved with their recent battles in Korea, were anxious to encourage the French to continue fighting. Marguerite Higgins quotes a letter that President Eisenhower sent to Prime Minister Winston Churchill on April 5, 1954, which said in part: "It is no solution to simply urge the French to intensify their efforts. And if they do not see it through and Indochina passes into the hands of the Communists, the ultimate effect on our and your global strategic position with the consequent shift in the power relations throughout Asia and the Pacific could be disastrous, and I know unacceptable to you and me. . . . This has led us urgently to *take serious and far-reaching decisions*. . . . The preliminary lines of our thinking were sketched out by Foster [John Foster Dulles] in his speech last Monday night when he said that under the conditions of today the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community, and that in our view this possibility should be met by united action and not passively accepted. . . ." After suggesting a new coalition of non-Communist nations in the area, Eisenhower went on to say, "I do not envisage the need of any *appreciable ground forces* on your or our part. . . ." (quoted in Higgins, p. 9. Italics hers.)

The French were ready to negotiate, and on May 7, 1954,

the Geneva Conference opened. Those who took part were the representatives of Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the Viet Minh government), France, Laos, the People's Republic of China (Red China), the State of Vietnam (Bao Dai's government, which at last, with the promise of real independence, persuaded Ngo Dinh Diem to take power on June 17, 1954, as Prime Minister), the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom (Great Britain), and the United States of America.

So much as been said about the bindingness of the final declaration of this conference (with the opponents of the current war saying, "We are violating the Geneva Conference," and advocates saying righteously, "We didn't sign it,") that one point should be stressed. In the words of Jean Lacouture (a French journalist who was not sympathetic to American policy), "It is noteworthy that what has generally come to be called 'the Geneva Agreement of 1954' is in fact a series of armistic agreements made by the French army representatives and the Viet Minh delegates. . . . Nothing else was *signed*, particularly not the final declaration made at the conference. Saigon, which did not hide its disagreement with the final declaration, and Washington, which showed some reserve on that score, therefore had no reason to refuse to apply their signatures to it. They did not consider themselves committed to these texts even though Gen. Bedell Smith, chief of the American delegation, had declared that his country would do nothing to prevent their implementation." (Lacouture, p. 11. *Italics his.*) According to Robert Shaplen, an American journalist with much experience in Asia, Diem "considered what had happened at Geneva a disgrace, and had wisely ordered Dr. Tran Van Do, his representative there, to disassociate South Vietnam from the agreements that were signed, thereby laying the legal groundwork for his subsequent refusal to abide by them. He con-

sidered the division of Vietnam a personal betrayal and echoed Dr. Do's final Geneva declaration that South Vietnam 'reserved to itself entire freedom of action to safeguard the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to territorial unity, national independence, and freedom.'" (Shaplen, p. 113)

According to Lacouture, there were five principal clauses to the armistice agreements signed by the Viet Minh and the French representatives. These included 1) partitioning of the country at the 17th parallel, 2) French forces to be evacuated during October, 3) no military build-up in any part of the country, 4) establishment of an International Control Commission of delegates from India, Canada, and Poland, and 5) elections to unify the country to be held before July 20, 1956. "It was further understood that neither of the two parties in Vietnam was authorized to make international military alliances," finishes Mr. Lacouture. (Lacouture, p. 11) Mr. Lacouture also tells us that the partitioning of the country was suggested by the representatives of the Viet Minh. "Suddenly, on June 8, the military delegation of Viet Minh offered to partition Vietnam, accepting control over only about half the territory of which the revolutionary forces were already controlling three quarters." (Lacouture, p. 10)

The text of the final (unsigned) declaration itself takes note of various agreements and, among others, makes the following points: There were "clauses in the agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Viet-Nam prohibiting the introduction into Viet-Nam of foreign troops and military personnel as well as of all kinds of arms and munitions." There were "clauses in the agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Viet-Nam to the effect that no military base under the control of a foreign state may be established in the regrouping zones of the two parties, the latter having the obligation to see

that the zones allotted to them shall not constitute part of any military alliance and shall not be utilized for the resumption of hostilities or in the service of an aggressive policy." And perhaps most often overlooked in arguments about the war: "The Conference recognizes that the essential purpose of the agreement relating to Viet-Nam is to settle military questions with a view to ending hostilities and that the military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary. The Conference expresses its conviction that the execution of the provisions set out in the present declaration and in the agreement on the cessation of hostilities creates the necessary basis for the achievement in the near future of a political settlement in Viet-Nam." Everyone was to be allowed "to decide freely in which zone he wishes to live," and supervised general elections were to be held in July, 1956; "Consultations will be held on this subject between the competent representative authorities of the two zones from 20 July 1955 onwards." (*Final Declaration of Geneva Conference, July 21, 1954*, reprinted in Raskin and Fall, p. 96ff.)

In September, 1954, after the Geneva Conference ended, the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty (SEATO) was signed by the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, and Pakistan. It was ratified in February, 1955. This treaty has often been referred to as a legal reason for our being in Vietnam, which will be discussed later. Suffice it to mention here that it was signed after the conference, and that Vietnam was not a signatory.

This is a condensed background of the founding of what was to be called the "Diem regime" in South Vietnam, and perhaps the first question that we should now address ourselves to is the following:

Is there any evidence that this government had any popular support among the Vietnamese, or is it the case that it could validly be called merely a remnant of French colonialism?

There is such evidence. First of all, there is the evidence of the movement of peoples between the two zones in accordance with the Geneva Conference. Viet Minh troops in the south were ordered north, and, according to Robert Shaplen, "Some fifty thousand troops and twenty thousand Vietminh sympathizers went north, but as they withdrew from areas they had controlled, it soon became evident that they had left behind a strong network of cadres to carry on covert political, psychological and ultimately, paramilitary operations." (Shaplen, p. 114) How many refugees went south? Marguerite Higgins quotes Diem's brother, Counselor Ngo Dinh Nhu as saying to the United Nations Mission to Vietnam in October, 1963: "President Diem asked the French how many refugees to expect. The French said twenty-five thousand. Instead, there were a million." (Higgins, p. 55) This figure is not documented--Miss Higgins considers that the real figure might be closer to two million; Robert Shaplen puts it at 860,000; Jean Lacouture says "nearly a million." In addition, the French decided to evacuate the Red River Delta of Tonkin immediately, rather than supervise the evacuation of all the refugees that wished to leave. "The cut-off date for the evacuation was May 18, 1955," says Robert Shaplen, "and though Diem claimed later that twice as many as 860,000 would have fled the north if they had been allowed to, realistic estimates put the number of those who wanted to leave but couldn't at no more than 400,000." (Shaplen, pp. 114-15) The most conservative estimate, therefore, is that over 800,000 Vietnamese were so actively non-sympathetic to communism that they would rather abandon their homes and rice fields than live under a Communist government. It has been said that

"refugees are people that vote with their feet." So we see that many more people than were expected were willing to "vote" for Diem's untried government at a period of unprecedented prestige for Ho Chi Minh's victorious Viet Minh.

Diem must have had administrative ability, because these refugees, a sizable number whichever estimate you go by, were absorbed and resettled in South Vietnam while he was still in the process of attempting to set up an administration.

In October, 1955, Diem held an election, variously referred to as a plebescite or a referendum, in which he asked the people to choose between Bao Dai as Chief of State or himself as President. Shaplen reports that Diem won "by the overwhelming margin of 5,722,000 votes for himself, with only 63,000 for his opponent. . . . The Americans felt that Diem's public image was hurt by the fact that Nhu had rigged the huge vote for his brother, and that Diem would have won easily anyway without any manipulation." (Shaplen, p. 129) In April, 1961, President Diem was re-elected for another five-year term, again with a large majority. Sir Robert Thompson, a veteran of the successful counter-insurgency in Malaya, who headed the British Advisory Mission in Vietnam from 1961 to 1963, makes an interesting point about elections during an insurgency in a country with few democratic traditions. The concept of a loyal opposition is unknown in such circumstances, he says. "I have no doubt that President Diem would still have got a majority, particularly from the rural population, which would have given great satisfaction to any western President or Prime Minister. What could not be tolerated in the circumstances of the country at the time was evidence in the voting of a large, if disunited, opposition which sought not just the constitutional overthrow of the government but the assassination of the Pres-

ident and his closest supporters." (Thompson, p. 67)

Jean Lacouture calls the first election "a plebiscite as orderly as possible in a country barely recovered from the wounds of war and in the process of reunification." (Lacouture, p. 28)

So the young Saigon government had some distinguishable local support, and expectations of support from an anti-Communist America whose administration was concerned about Communist expansion in the Far East. But already one can see that the situation might become complex. Once one has assimilated the relatively remote historical background, one can see the kinds of arguments that would arise and the kinds of questions that would occur. Are there grounds for an argument that the United States presence in Vietnam is illegal? Have the South Vietnamese become more willing to cooperate with Communism since 1954? And what caused the downfall of President Diem? In a future article, these and other questions will be examined and discussed.

--Joan Kennedy Taylor

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